

Adopted 4/5/2004

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLAN**  
**CENTRAL AREA**  
**COLUMBUS, INDIANA**

**Columbus Redevelopment Commission**

## Section I     Geographic Area

This plan is prepared in accordance with IC 36-7-14-41 to promote economic development on the property shown on the map labeled “Attachment 1.” This area encompasses the downtown area and related industrial and commercial areas.

## Section II     Goals & Objectives

The Columbus Redevelopment Commission has two overall goals:

- Enhance the economic health and vitality of Columbus
- Increase the city’s tax base

Central to the achievement of those overarching goals are the following objectives:

- Maintain and enhance community assets that attract visitors, businesses and employees
  - ❖ Continue to provide attractive parks and open space and a wide variety of recreational opportunities
  - ❖ Maintain a vibrant, active, attractive downtown
- Provide the full range of high-quality infrastructure elements necessary to support business growth and retention
- Grow amateur sports and sports tourism

## Section III     Downtown Columbus

Columbus has long recognized the important role that the downtown plays in the overall economic health of the community. For nearly 40 years, the city has engaged in downtown planning and improvement projects. In 1968, Skidmore Owings and Merrill prepared the *Central Area Plan*, which was the basis for the activities of the Redevelopment Commission that existed at that time. In 1983, the same firm was hired to update that plan, and in 1988, Architect Paul Kennon prepared a report entitled, *Some Community Ideas*. Several different downtown planning committees, including Historic Columbus Development, also sought advice on downtown revitalization. Many downtown changes took place as a direct result of those plans:

- Headquarters for Home News Enterprises and print facility for The Republic (local newspaper)
- Library Plaza
- The Commons and Courthouse Center
- New city hall
- Old city hall rehabilitated as Columbus Inn
- Streetscape improvements
- Carscape parking lot
- Downtown traffic pattern changed
- Mill Race Park improvement
- New Second Street Bridge

- Management plan for downtown parking
- Improvement of two downtown alleys
- Downtown banners
- New holiday decorations

Despite all of these planning efforts and improvement projects, the downtown continues to face challenges. Retail faces increasing competition from malls and concentrated retail developments in other areas of the city. The infrastructure downtown is aging, and multiple studies conducted over the past several decades have noted that parking is inadequate.

City and economic development officials know that a healthy, vibrant downtown is vital to the city's ability to attract new economic growth in other parts of the community. Officials of companies located in the Woodside area have reported that the attractiveness of Downtown Columbus was an important factor in their decision to invest in Columbus. A successful downtown also offers shopping, dining, and entertainment opportunities for residents, and is important in employee recruitment. Continued improvements will help the community attract new businesses, allow existing businesses to grow.

## **Section IV Plan for Economic Growth**

The Goals and Policies Element of the Comprehensive Plan of the City of Columbus included these goals and policies for downtown Columbus:

**Goal E-1. Downtown Columbus:** (Washington & Franklin Streets, between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets)

This area is characterized by tree-lined streets, cleanliness, attractive buildings, well-maintained sidewalks, buildings of a consistent scale, low-key signs, pedestrian orientation, attractive window displays, buildings close to the street, parking in community lots or behind buildings.

**POLICY E-1-1:** Maintain the downtown as the heart of the city, retaining its function as the government, institutional, and financial center of the community.

*The downtown is important to the community, healthy communities have strong downtowns. Traditional downtown functions include government, institutional uses (such as churches and schools) and finance, and those should be retained in downtown Columbus.*

**POLICY E-1-2:** Encourage retail, entertainment, restaurant, and similar uses which add to the vitality of the downtown, with emphasis on after-hours and weekend activities.

*There is no greater asset to a downtown than people. Successful downtowns are "destination" places: places people seek out for activities and shopping, rather than places people pass by or visit en route to some other destination. The city should encourage a land use mix which will attract people to the downtown.*

**POLICY E-1-3:** Encourage development of additional parking that is consistent with the character of downtown.

*People will not go downtown if there is no place to park, and the city needs to encourage sufficient downtown parking. This parking, however, should complement the character of downtown. For example, removing buildings and replacing them with surface parking lots damages the fabric of downtown and creates blank spaces which do not attract pedestrian activity.*

**POLICY E-1-4:** Encourage signs and landscaping which enhance the attractiveness of downtown and which contribute to the economic vitality of downtown businesses.

*Appropriate signs and landscaping contribute to the attractiveness and character of downtown. For example, trees add to the beauty of downtown, but they should not hide buildings or create hazards for pedestrians. Similarly, signs which complement the downtown architecture should be encouraged, along with signs which are pedestrian-oriented.*

**POLICY E-1-5:** Ensure that the public signs (i.e., traffic control signs, “no parking” signs, ect.) are designed to minimize clutter and maximize readability.

*Visitors to downtown should have clear and concise information about traffic and parking regulations, and the city should strive to make public informational and regulatory signs as readable and understandable as possible.*

**POLICY E-1-6:** Encourage residential uses on the upper floors of downtown buildings.

*Many successful downtowns have encouraged mixed land uses. Downtown residents patronize the businesses provide 24-hour occupancy in the area.*

**POLICY E-1-7:** Prepare a plan for downtown and the surrounding area which addresses land use, traffic circulation, parking, and design.

*The city should develop a coherent plan for downtown. This plan should promote the vitality and economic health of the downtown area to serve local residents and visitors to the community.*

The land use element raised several concerns and established land use planning principles for downtown. These are included in Appendix A. The Redevelopment Commission recognizes the need for a specific downtown plan, as noted in Policy E-1-7 above, and is working toward the production of such a plan.

The Columbus Redevelopment Commission intends to capture tax increments from new and expanded development within the Central Area for the purpose of undertaking public improvement projects that will help ensure a healthy business climate for the companies that locate within the area and promotes, enhances and grows amateur sports and sports tourism.

## **Section V Findings**

The Redevelopment Commission makes the following findings with regard to the Economic Development Plan for Central Columbus:

**1. The plan promotes significant opportunities for gainful employment of Columbus Citizens.**

The city's current economic development strategy calls for an emphasis on high value-added jobs in information technology (IT), life sciences, and advanced manufacturing. To help attract companies that will provide these kinds of jobs, Columbus needs a vibrant downtown. The many design improvements that have been made are not sufficient to attract and retain downtown businesses and thus create the city center that companies desire when making new investment in a community.

**2. The plan for the Central Area cannot be achieved by regulatory process or by the ordinary operation of private enterprise without resort to the powers allowed the Redevelopment Commission because there is a lack of local public improvements in the area.**

The Central Area lacks the infrastructure needed to implement the economic development strategy. The combined sanitary and storm sewer system is aging and will need to be improved and rehabilitated. New office uses in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century require the infrastructure to facilitate use of high-speed communication equipment. Many businesses cite lack of adequate, conveniently located parking as a detriment to downtown investment. Improvements to these and other facilities are needed to ensure a successful downtown, which in turn will help stimulate and retain economic growth in the entire Central Area.

Significant park and recreation improvements have been made in the downtown, but the riverfront remains underutilized. A riverfront development plan has been prepared, but available funds for its implementation have not yet been identified.

Columbus has long recognized that "downtown is everybody's neighborhood," but this is a neighborhood in need of economic revitalization. Development in the Central Area has been hampered by the city's inability to fund the needed public improvements.

**3. The public health and welfare will be benefited by the accomplishment of the plan for the Central Area.**

Implementation of this plan will lead to job creation across a broad spectrum, from low skilled to highly skilled and in a variety of pay scales. These jobs include office, sales, financial, and support service jobs in the downtown itself as well as in the outlying areas that are influenced by a lively downtown. They also include manufacturing, research, and other jobs in the industrial and research parks. These jobs will improve the standard of living in the community and thus will benefit the public health and welfare.

4. **The accomplishment of the plan for the Central Area Development area will be a public utility and benefit as measured by the attraction of permanent jobs, an increase in the property tax base, ~~and~~ improved diversity of the economic base, increase in amateur sports tourism and activities, and development and growth of collegiate level athletics.**

This plan is aimed specifically at adding new jobs and diversifying the Columbus economy. The new businesses that will be attracted to the Central Area will invest in new buildings which will increase the property tax base for the city.

This plan is also intended to improve the quality of life, attract athletes, spectators, residents, and businesses through quality facilities and activities.

5. **The plan for the Central Area Development Area Conforms to other development plans for the unit.**

The City of Columbus has an adopted Comprehensive Plan. The portions of that plan that relate to the Central Area are hereby incorporated as part of this plan.

6. **The Central Area is an appropriate geographic area to be designated as an Economic Development Area.**

A successful downtown is critical to a successful economy. The downtown's influence extends well beyond any defined boundaries of the downtown itself, as its vitality is an important factor in the locational decisions of business enterprises. The capture of tax increments from the new development will enable the city to provide the public improvements necessary to make the downtown a thriving hub of economic activity to benefit the entire community.



